UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/AC.70/1994/NGO/1
11 May 1994

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON THE REVIEW
OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH
NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
First session
6-10 June 1994
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

GENERAL REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR CONSULTATIONS WITH NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

Statement submitted by the World Federation of United Nations Associations, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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The World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA), an international non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I, submits this statement to the Open-Ended Working Group for its consideration on this most important review process.

The "raison d'être" of WFUNA is to promote public understanding of the United Nations and to mobilize public support for its activities. The Federation is comprised of over 80 national United Nations associations, located in all regions of the world, two thirds of which are in developing countries. Our aim is to bring the "people" closer to the United Nations and the United Nations closer to the "people".

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* E/AC.70/1994/2.

Human beings have, throughout history, organized themselves into groups to pursue common ideas and goals. Some well-known examples in recent times are the international movements for disarmament and peace, environmental groups, the anti-apartheid coalitions and the world-wide mobilization for the rights of women. Also, more recently, we have witnessed the growing importance of national and international groups concerned with sustainable development and human rights issues. All these groups have, naturally, sought an international outreach, wanted to establish world-wide networks and asked to be heard at the United Nations and its conferences.

WFUNA very warmly welcomes all those who want to work with the United Nations and we encourage the United Nations system to respond with equal warmth and openness. We have clearly stated, on several occasions, the need to open the United Nations doors as broadly as possible. Thus, we appeal to the Working Group to build on the positive experience of present arrangements and, more importantly, to provide for new opportunities for the participation of non-governmental organizations. We strongly urge the extension of participatory rights to those non-governmental organizations that do not now have consultative status. However, it is most important that any process of opening up the United Nations to new non-governmental organizations, whether national or international in scope, be structured, transparent and consistent.

We would like to request the Working Group to examine ways of arranging a series of informal consultations between the members of the Working Group and interested non-governmental organizations on an ongoing basis throughout the duration of the review. Such informal sessions would serve to ensure that decisions eventually taken by Member States reflect the fullest consultation and that they could claim the support of those parties most particularly affected. We in the Federation would welcome playing a useful role in assisting with the arrangements for such consultations. In our view, this is a matter of utmost urgency.

Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations provides for "arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations". In its resolution 1296 (XLIV), Part I, paragraphs 1-8, the Economic and Social Council specifies the requirements that must be fulfilled to obtain recognition as an international non-governmental organization and that, in fact, constitute the very definition of an international non-governmental organization. It is WFUNA's view that these provisions are adequate and should be strictly observed in granting consultative status. We feel that the definition of international non-governmental organizations contained in Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) requires no change. However, we recognize that some changes may be required to address the question of the role of national non-governmental organizations and others in their relations with the Economic and Social Council. We are convinced that these accommodations should not diminish those participatory rights already acquired by non-governmental organizations in consultative status.

Furthermore, in connection with international conferences, we see the need to elaborate a definition of a national non-governmental organization, for the sake of clarity and consistency. We would like to emphasize that WFUNA advocates granting full participatory rights in United Nations conferences to

relevant non-governmental organizations not in consultative status but it is imperative that the legitimacy of those non-governmental organizations that wish to be accepted as observers be properly established in an orderly and transparent way.

Moreover, WFUNA is convinced that for the benefit of the substantive work of United Nations conferences, provisions for the participation of business groups, universities, municipalities, regional governments in Member States and other relevant entities must be devised. Although these groups do not fall into the category of non-governmental organizations, their expert contributions must be taken into account. We believe that it would be worth while to consider a separate form of recognition and procedures for consultation for these groups.

WFUNA wishes to stress that it is fully aware of the practical difficulties that might result if a great many non-governmental organizations are granted status with the Economic and Social Council or admitted to international conferences. We believe that practical problems should be addressed in practical ways, depending on the circumstances of each situation. Principles should not be diluted or tampered with merely to accommodate the expedient.

We are certain that consultations between the United Nations and the non-governmental organization community can address such practical problems, in an ad hoc way, if good will and trust are present. We also believe that this good will and trust can be created and maintained if the present review is conducted in an open and cooperative fashion. You can be assured of the fullest cooperation of our Federation in this regard. We are also convinced that forcing the creation of clusters or groupings, in advance, is unquestionable not the solution to this problem. An orderly and predictable process for accreditation to conferences which tests the viability of new groups will greatly assist. Also, the early establishment of liaison groups between the United Nations conference secretariat and the non-governmental organization community could alleviate some of the practical difficulties.

As far as consultative status is concerned, WFUNA finds that the present procedures for consultation with the Council, the commissions and other subsidiary organs of the Council are adequate. We know of cases where the representation of some non-governmental organizations with consultative status has not been of the highest order. However, over the years, the overall exercise of participatory rights by non-governmental organizations in consultative status has proven to be most effective.

Sadly, the rules that have been established for the Commission on Sustainable Development, have seriously curtailed the participatory rights of non-governmental organizations. We were disappointed that this vital and innovative new commission, through what we must assume was a failure to understand fully the implications of certain decisions, while attempting to open itself to greater participation by non-governmental organizations, greatly reduced the effectiveness of that participation.

Clearly, the arrangements for the participation of non-governmental organizations in international conferences convened by the United Nations are far from satisfactory and require prompt adoption of uniform and consistent

rules. Although the recent international conferences admitted more non-governmental organizations as observers than ever before, these non-governmental organizations were not granted any real participatory rights, nor were adequate seating arrangements provided.

In our opinion, the rules for United Nations conferences should grant non-governmental organizations in consultative status similar rights to those they enjoy with the Economic and Social Council, and these rights should be exercisable from the beginning of the preparatory process. These rules should be the same for non-governmental organizations in consultative status and for other non-governmental organizations admitted by special procedures as at UNCED and the World Conference on Human Rights. WFUNA is ready to submit concrete proposals concerning such rules at the appropriate time.

We also wish to point out that the term "accreditation" does not appear at all in Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV). Consultative status gives non-governmental organizations automatic access and participatory rights without any further scrutiny. It also carries with it the right to register as a participant during the sessions of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies, as well as at United Nations conferences, without being "accredited".

We wish to make one additional point. There is an urgent need to upgrade and strengthen the resources of the NGO Unit in order for it to cope with its normal duties, to serve the Working Group and to meet the challenges it will face after the United Nations doors have been opened more widely.

Finally, we would like to assure the Open-Ended Working Group that we would be more than happy to share with it the expertise the WFUNA has acquired in its more than four decades as a non-governmental organization in consultative status and in its capacity as the only non-governmental organization whose sole and exclusive purpose is the advancement of the United Nations.